

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDUBJ: REGIONAL ARMS RESTRAINTS STUDY

REF: STATE 020621

SUMMARY. BELIEVE GABON WOULD WELCOME REGIONAL AGREEMENT
ON ARMS RESTRAINT, BUT WOULD BE HARD TO CONVINCE THAT
ANY GEN ARRANGEMENTCIENTLY WATERTIGHT TO
ASSURE ITS SECURITY. IN THIS CONTEXT, USG PARTICIPA-
TION IN SECURITY GUARIH BSVE OMITMENT TO RESTRAINT WOULD BE KEY FACTOR.

END

SUMMARY.

1. AS DEPARTMENT AWARE, GOG IS EXTREMELELAT
ITS SECURITY. TWO OF ITS THREE NEIGHBORS (CONGO-B AND
EQUATORIAL GUINEA) ARE RECIPIENTS OF SOVIET MILITARY
ASSISTANCE AND ARE CONSIDERED BY GOG TO BE IDEOLOGI-
CALLY HOSTILE, AND EVEN THIRD NEIGHBOR (CAMEROON) IS
SOMETIMES SUSPECTED OF COVETING GABONESE WEALTH.

2. COPE WITH THIS ENVIRONMENT, WHICH THEY PERCEIVE
AS HOSTILE, GABONESE HAVE BEGUN WHAT IS FOR THEM A
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MAJOR EFFORT TO IMPROVE THEIR OWN MILITARY CAPABILITIES.
PREVIOUSLY EQUIPPED LARGELY WITH FRENCH CAST-OFFS,

GABONESE ARMED SERVICES ARE NOW SEEKING MORE MODERN ARMS AND MATERIEL, INCLUDING SUCH SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS SYSTEMS AS FRENCH MIRAGE FIGHTER AIRCRAFT. IN GOG EYES, GABON MUST HAVE MILITARY STRENGTH SUFFICIENT TO DETER WOULD-BE AGGRESSORS, AND GOG CURRENTLY DEFINES ITS MOST IMMEDIATE NEEDS IN TERMS OF MATCHING SOVIET EQUIPMENT AVAILABLE TO CONGO-B FORCES.

3. DESPITE THIS RUSH TO ARMS, HOWEVER, GABONESE STILL PLACE PRIMARY EMPHASIS ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, WHERE EFFORTS ARE ALREADY SUBJECT TO SOME CONSTRAINT BECAUSE OF LIMITATIONS IN AVAILABLE RESOURCES. THUS, WEAPONS PROCUREMENT REPRESENTS FOR THE GOG FURTHER DIVERSION OF RESOURCES URGENTLY NEEDED FOR DEVELOPMENT, AND GABONESE WOULD PRESUMABLY WELCOME ARRANGEMENT WHICH WOULD PERMIT THEM TO LIMIT SUCH DIVERSIONARY EXPENDITURES.

4. PROBLEM IN DEVELOPING ARRANGEMENT FOR REGIONAL ARMS RESTRAINT WOULD BE TO MAKE IT SUFFICIENTLY WATER-TIGHT TO CONVINCE GOG THAT SUCH SYSTEM OF MUTUAL RESTRAINT COULBWSSURE ITS NATIONAL SECURITY AS WELL AS (OR BETTER THAN) BUILDUP OF MILITARY FORCES. SINCE GOG PERCEIVES THREAT PRIMARILY IN TERMS OF SOVIET-EQUIPPED NEIGHBORS, KEY ELEMENT FOR GABONESE WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE SOME FORM OF SOVIET AGREEMENT TO HALT OR LIMIT SUPPLIES TO CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE AND EQUATORIAL GUINEA.

5. LONGSTANDING GABONESE SUSPICION OF SOVIET MOTIVES IN AFRICA HAS BEEN SHARPLY HEIGHTENED BY SOVIET INTERVENTION IN ANGOLA, HOWEVER, AND HAS ALMOST CERTAINLY INCREASED GABONESE RELUCTANCE TO TRUST THEIR SECURITY TO ANY SCHEME BASED ON SOVIET PROMISES. TO BE ACCEPTABLE TO GOG, REGIONAL ARMS RESTRAINT ARRANGEMENT THUS PRESUMABLY WOULD HAVE TO INCORPORATE SOME FORM OF ASSURANCE FROM WESTERN SUPPLIERS THAT THEY WOULD PROVIDE GABON WITH COUNTERWEIGHT TO ANY SOVIET SHIPMENTS EFFECTED IN VIOLATION OF ARMS LIMITATION AGREEMENT.

6. USG ROLE COULD ARISE IN CONNECTION WITH SUCH ASSURANCE,
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AS WE ARE ALREADY SEEN BY GOG AS POTENTIAL SOURCE OF ARMS COUNTERWEIGHT TO SOVIET WEAPONS PRESENTLY IBDAND OF ITS NEIGHBORS. IN CONTEXT OF REGIONAL ARMS RESTRAINT ARRANGEMENT INVOLVING BOTH SOVIETS AND WESTERN SUPPLIERS, USG INCLUSION AMONG GUARANTORS COULD PROVE HELPFUL IN SECURIYT GOG ACCEPTANCE OF ARMS LIMITATION AS EFFECTIVE MEANS OF INSURING ITS NATIONAL SECURITY. US ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, WHILE WELCOME, COULD NOT FILL THIS ROLE AS GABONESE LIKELY ARGUE THAT ANY INCREASE IN THEIR WEALTH ONLY LIKELY FURTHER TO STIMULATE COVETOUSNESS OF THEIR NEIGHBORS.

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